



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4204

March 3, 2005

The Honorable Jim Nussle
Chairman
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Spratt, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Nussle and Ranking Member Spratt:

I am writing out of concern that the Administration's Fiscal Year 2006 Budget of the U.S. Government cuts or eliminates several programs that are vital to my rural constituency in Tennessee's Fourth Congressional District, as well as rural areas throughout the United States.

I am extremely troubled by the Administration's proposal to eliminate funding for the Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (EBJAG) in the Fiscal Year 2006 Budget. The production and abuse of methamphetamine is a widespread problem in Tennessee and is quickly becoming a major issue for America. The Drug Enforcement Administration estimates for 2004 have Tennessee ranked third nationally for methamphetamine arrests and seizures. Methamphetamine production and abuse destroys lives, families, property, the surrounding environment, and is an incredible burden on local communities and law enforcement officials. Now is the time to fight this illicit drug, and all illegal substances head-on with increased man power and funding. Drug task forces in my district and state rely heavily on EBJAG to fight the local war on drugs. Eliminating this grant program gives the criminals an even greater advantage over our communities and law enforcement offices. Such an elimination of this valuable grant program puts the future of our children, families, and friends in grave danger. I believe this is completely unacceptable and ask the House Budget Committee to restore EBJAG funding to the FY'04 level of \$659.1 million.

Additionally, rural America has come to depend on the State and Local Homeland Security Grants to keep local and volunteer fire departments, as well as local law enforcement offices, functioning at full capacity. Without these grants many rural communities would not be able to fully staff their fire and police departments or provide them with updated equipment necessary to keep our communities safe. I was very dismayed to see the President's budget propose to cut this grant program by \$420 million. Congress should not leave rural America unprotected and unprepared for day to day emergencies or future catastrophic attacks. It is my hope that the House Budget Committee will realize the importance of these grants to rural America and restore FY'06 funding for the State and Local Homeland Security Grants to the FY'05 level of \$3.985 billion.

Another primary concern is the Administration's proposal to move the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the Department of Commerce as part of the new "Strengthening America's Communities" (SAC) initiative. CDBG has been very beneficial in my district and in over 3,000 rural communities as a part of HUD. In 2004 the town of Oneida, TN received \$500,000 from the state of Tennessee through CDBG for water and sewer infrastructure development. Without these crucial funds the officials in Oneida would be forced to both raise taxes and utilities rates on an economically distressed community. Such a scenario would be a job killer for the town and greatly impede future economic development. That said, I request the House Budget Committee leave CDBG as a part of HUD and fund the program at the FY'05 level of \$4.1 billion.

Veterans in my district are very apprehensive towards the proposed cuts to veterans' benefits. The President's budget proposal calls for Priority Group 7 and 8 veterans pay an annual enrollment fee of \$250 and an increase in prescription drug co-payments from \$7 to \$15 as part of their benefits. You may recall that the co-pay amount for these veterans was recently increased from \$2-\$7 in 2000. The Department of Veterans Affairs anticipates the new "out-of-pocket costs" will result in 1.1 million veterans choosing to leave the system. I ask the House Budget Committee to ignore this proposal, and additionally, to restore funding for state grants for extended care facilities.

Finally, my constituents and I are concerned about several eliminations in the Administration's proposed budget for education programs. The cuts in vocational education are particularly harmful for constituents in my district, many of whom are not able to attend traditional four year institutions of higher learning. Vocational training provides opportunities for employment in new and exciting fields that can lead to rewarding careers. I am sure the House Budget Committee will take a hard look at the Administration's proposal to eliminate vocational education and investigate which programs are truly wasteful, and which are truly necessary for ensuring rural Americans can continue to be a part of our country's well trained workforce.

While I understand the necessity of paying back our deficit and working towards a balanced budget, and commend the House Budget Committee on its efforts, I think it is wrong to do so at the expense of those who have defended our nation in times of war and those who have had the hardest lot in life. Veterans and the good people who make up rural America are not second class citizens, and they should not be treated as such in the President's proposed Fiscal Year 2006 Budget of the U.S. Government.

Sincerely,

Lincoln Davis
Member of Congress